

Farms wither

Wells dry, herds cut

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Drought - Wis.

Lack of pasture, a shortage of hay, the increasing need to sell cattle and drying of wells is putting Wisconsin farm families to the test as they become more desperate with worsening drought conditions, the Governor's Drought Task Force reported Tuesday.

Peter Senn, state executive director of the Wisconsin Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committee, said farmers may not have any crops to harvest if these conditions persist.

"Farmers are cutting everything green but the trees," he said. "They are harvesting canary grass and marsh hay on marshland they haven't been able to put a tractor on in 30 years."

In Wood County in central Wisconsin, wells on five dairy farms have gone dry, and up to 5,000 gallons of water are being hauled to each farm for livestock.

John Kolpanen, state humane officer, said the shipment of cattle to bring numbers in line with expected feed supplies had led to panic conditions among farmers in parts of Richland and Trempealeau counties.

Normally, feed supplies would be at their seasonal peak in late June, but this year county Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service offices reported that farmers in four counties would be out of feed in July.

An ASCS survey showed feed supplies would be depleted in August in 11 counties, in September in 29 counties, in October in four counties and in November in 10 counties. Only two counties had enough feed to last farmers through February.

The task force met to prepare a set of drought assistance recommendations that Gov. Tommy Thompson will take to Chicago for Thursday's meeting of the National Governors Association Agriculture Committee. The committee will meet with U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Richard Lyng.

One of Thompson's emergency measures, a 30-day authority to get permits to pump water from rivers, streams or lakes, has resulted in 312 permits being granted, Robert Roden, of the state Department of Natural Resources, reported.

■ There are possible drought winners/3A

■ Heat won't let rainfall soak in/3A

■ Hay harvests are approved/3A

■ Area fireworks are jeopardized/1B

■ How some people beat the heat/1B